



News Release

For Immediate Release:
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West Nile Virus Monitoring Ends for 2003

(Salt Lake City, UT) – West Nile virus monitoring in mosquitoes and birds has ended in Utah for 2003 and will resume next spring. Mosquitoes in Utah are preparing to hibernate, so the risk of infection for birds, horses, and humans is going down. This means that the public does not need to report any more dead birds this year. Public health agencies will continue to watch for additional human or horse cases.

In the U.S., most states experience an increase in West Nile virus activity the year after its first detection. Utah expects West Nile virus will return in 2004 and may have a greater impact on humans, birds, and animals. Public health officials are planning and preparing for such a situation. Next spring, West Nile virus monitoring and testing will resume with testing “sentinel” chickens, mosquitoes, horses, and dead birds reported by the public. As always, clinicians and laboratories that detect and report the virus infection in people will be an important part of West Nile virus tracking. The “Fight the Bite” public education campaign will also resume in the spring and run through the time period of highest risk.

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) would like to thank everyone that reported dead birds this year. The monitoring of West Nile virus was successful this summer, due in large part to public interest and concern. Public health officials identified West Nile virus in birds, mosquitoes, and horses before finding any human infections. The detection of West Nile virus led to mosquito control measures and more intense public education. These measures reduced human exposure to West Nile virus.

Nine Utah counties (Carbon, Duchesne, Emery, Grand, Millard, Sanpete, Uintah, Utah, and Wayne) found West Nile virus by the end of the 2003 mosquito season.

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One Utah resident acquired West Nile virus infection in Uintah County this year. For up-to-date information on West Nile virus case counts and testing numbers, please visit www.health.utah.gov/wnv.

The UDOH would like to thank and acknowledge our partners, the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, 12 Utah local health departments, local mosquito abatement districts, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, health care professionals, laboratories, veterinarians, zoos, and aviaries, for helping with the tracking and monitoring of West Nile virus in Utah.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.